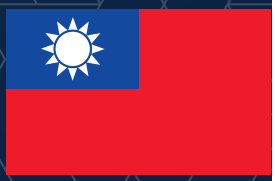
DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

POST-WAR SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN UKRAINE:

AN INTERPRETATION OF INSIGHTS FROM FINLAND, SOUTH KOREA AND TAIWAN



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About this publication project

This publication is part of a policy research project on Post-War Security Sector Reform, entitled ‘Striking a Balance between Effectiveness and Democratic Accountability within the Defense Sector: Learning lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view of Ukraine’ undertaken by DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

This comparative policy research project aims to identify challenges and best practices of post-war Security Sector Reform (SSR). It focuses on external strategies for building defense and security alliances, and internal strategies aimed at enhancing credible deterrence, democratic civil-military relations, and accountability—drawing lessons from Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan with a view to Ukraine. In a similar way as Ukraine, these countries were at war and have experienced a permanent threat of war over decades. Nevertheless, they have succeeded in enforcing their sovereignty despite facing asymmetrical power relations and being on the edge of geopolitical tensions. Moreover, they have managed to become consolidated democracies despite the constant pressure of securitization. What lessons can inspire, and which challenges may provide food-for-thought for Ukraine’s own SSR efforts during and post-war?

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CAP	Comprehensive Assistance Package
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EU	European Union
EUMAM	European Union Military Assistance Mission
G7	Group of Seven
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
JATEC	Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSATU	NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine
NSDC	National Security and Defence Council
NAKO	Independent Anti-Corruption Commission
OPCON	Operational Control
ROK	Republic of Korea
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Two years into the Russian full-scale invasion and a decade after the annexation of Crimea and the onset of hostilities in Donbas, Ukraine, though still reliant on external weapon supplies, Ukraine has already made a significant progress in reforming its military-industrial complex to become more self-sufficient. Initial optimism arose from the supportive response of its Western partners and the granting of EU candidacy status, suggested promising prospects for NATO integration. However, two years later, the outlook for external military alliances is less bright. The US's foreign policy decisions and reluctance to provide timely military and political support to Ukraine are influenced by the upcoming elections, while the EU faces the necessity of reshaping its European security architecture. The enormous destruction that Russia is consistently inflicting on Ukraine's cities and the immense loss of life place significant pressure on society and the government, exacerbating societal differences and adding strain to institutional stability. Despite these challenges, Ukraine is striving to maintain strong civil-military oversight, transform its defense industry, attract foreign investment for economic recovery, and use its diplomatic efforts to build bilateral and multilateral military alliances.

Examples from other countries that have experienced similar asymmetrical security threats or active aggression from neighbors might be useful to Ukraine in navigating its options and next steps. This paper attempts to distil useful lessons for Ukraine from the cases of South Korea, Taiwan, and Finland, while being fully aware of the differences in historical, regional and political contexts. The comparative analysis is based on three papers: Wei-chin Lee, 'Post-War Security Sector Reform in Taiwan' Geneva: DCAF, 2024; Ilmari Käihkö, 'Post-War Security Sector Reform in Finland' Geneva: DCAF, 2024; Insoo Kim, 'Post-War Security Sector Reform in South Korea' Geneva: DCAF, 2024.

The discussion is divided into four parts: The first chapter provides an overview of Ukraine's international military cooperation over recent decades and discusses relevant lessons from the cases of Taiwan, South Korea and Finland. Chapter two focuses on Ukraine's defense sector, specifically the domestic military-defense industry and the capabilities of the armed forces and draws parallels and useful examples from the three aforementioned cases. The third chapter delves into Ukraine's democratic control over the armed forces and civil-military oversight, concluding with lessons from the three country cases. The concluding chapter summarizes the discussion and highlights examples that could be useful for Ukraine.

CHAPTER 2

External balancing strategies: international military cooperation and defense diplomacy

Understanding international military cooperation dynamics in Ukraine

Due to a lack of military capacity or an external military alliance, for a long time Ukraine had no option but to rely on external balancing strategies between its two neighboring power blocks. Under the first Ukrainian president, Leonid Kravchuk, the country quickly established its conventional armed forces as part of the process of state building. Nevertheless, since declaring its independence, Kyiv maintained a non-aligned status and had tried to find a balance between its relations with Russia and the West (Wojciech 2013). By signing the Budapest Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1994, Kyiv gave up its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal in exchange for territorial integrity and security assurances from the US, the UK and Russia. However, as early as 2003, Russia began contesting Crimea's status by initiating a territorial dispute over Tuzla Island, claiming that the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine applied only to the peninsula's mainland portion. This stance built on the 1992 resolution by the Russian State Duma, which declared the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine a historical error.[1] These Budapest security assurances proved insufficient in 2014, when Russia illegally annexed Crimea. Furthermore, Ukraine was one of the founding members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which also had a security dimension, but Kyiv's involvement was limited due to concerns regarding potential loss of sovereignty (Bailes, Baranovsky & Dunay 2007).

Throughout the 2010s, Ukraine significantly enhanced its cooperation with NATO following its accession to NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 1994, while also strengthening defense ties with the EU. After 2014, the alliance intensified its support for Ukraine's security efforts and the implementation of wide-ranging reforms based on NATO standards under the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP). In 2017, Kyiv formally applied for NATO membership, further deepening its engagement with the alliance. Since 2016, Ukraine's military reforms, including a focus on command and control, development of a non-commissioned officer corps and special forces, and clear procurement priorities, have created the conditions for a flexible and adaptable military force (Sanders 2023). Since 2022, Kyiv has received military assistance in the form of non-lethal assistance from NATO, EU member states, and other countries through bilateral agreements. Ad hoc formats, such as the Ramstein format, have proven to be more effective than conventional formats for decision-making and coordinating the delivery of military aid to Ukraine due to their ability to make and enforce military decisions quickly.[2]

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, it has become evident that Ukraine views NATO membership as the only viable security option for non-recurrence. The alliance has emphasized the need for interoperability, along with further democratic and security sector reforms, as prerequisites for the country's future membership (NATO 2024). To achieve this goal, Ukraine has prioritized deepening its cooperation with NATO and reforming its defense sector to meet NATO standards, even while actively engaged in war.

Some of the most significant steps include transforming the NATO – Ukraine Commission into the NATO–Ukraine Council, where allies and Ukraine participate as equals. Additionally, the 2016 Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine has been

[1] Resolution of the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation № 2809-I of May 21, 1992, 'On the Legal Assessment of Decisions of the Highest State Authorities of the RSFSR Regarding the Change in the Status of Crimea Adopted in 1954. ('Постановление Верховного Совета РФ от 21 мая 1992 г. № 2809-I 'О правовой оценке решений высших органов государственной власти РСФСР по изменению статуса Крыма, принятых в 1954 году').

[2] The Ramstein format brings together the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, comprising of all 32 NATO members as well as 24 other countries and the EU, and it coordinates the delivery of military aid to Ukraine.

upgraded to a multi-year program of assistance, aiming to support Kyiv in rebuilding its security and defense sector and facilitating the transition towards full interoperability with NATO. In February 2024, a new NATO–Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC) was established to analyze the lessons Ukraine has learned from a decade of Russian warfare (Struk 2024). Later that year, the Washington NATO Summit outlined further steps to strengthen Ukraine's deterrence and defense capabilities and improve its interoperability with NATO. It established the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) to coordinate military equipment and training for Ukraine, committed to a Pledge of Long-Term Security Assistance with a minimum baseline funding of €40 billion within a year, and appointed a NATO Senior Representative in Ukraine.[3]

Identifying challenges in Ukraine's international military cooperation in the post-war period

To effectively change Ukraine's position on the frontline, push back Russian armed forces, and achieve a stable and sustainable post-war situation, Ukraine will need strong guarantees that Russia will not launch another attack. One of Ukraine's main challenges in the coming years will be to secure its external military alliances by further advancing its integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and enhancing its own deterrence and offensive capabilities by strengthening its military and defense sector. Key elements to achieving this goal include scaling-up the domestic defense industry and upgrading its military to NATO standards.

Firstly, while Ukraine needs full and immediate NATO membership to end the war, many current NATO member states believe Ukraine's membership will only be possible once the war has ended with a negotiated settlement. This places Ukraine in a difficult position. In search of an alternative solution, proposals are circulating to provide security guarantees on a multilateral and/or bilateral basis, such as the Kyiv Security Compact[4] and the G7 guarantees,[5] which have been supported by various countries (Rasmussen & Yermak 2022). Ukraine has recently signed twenty bilateral security agreements with the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Spain, Belgium, and most recently the US and Japan (Balmforth & Dysa 2024). However, these agreements cannot be viewed as true security guarantees due to their limited scope and lack of enforcement mechanisms (Soldatenko 2024). They do, however, provide a good foundation for continued military support and investment in Ukraine's defense industry sector.

Secondly, Ukraine's dependence on military aid from its international partners can be a liability, as it hampers the development of a clear long-term vision for the future Ukraine's defense. The challenges posed by delays in the delivery of the US$60 billion US aid package to Ukraine illustrate the impact of the fluctuations in the domestic political climate of Ukraine's allies.

Lastly, another crucial aspect of international military cooperation involves investments in Ukraine's defense industry. Ukraine is reforming its formerly state-owned defense industrial complex to boost domestic arms

[3] For more details, please refer to the NATO Washington Summit Declaration.

[4] The Kyiv Security Compact is a document authored by ex-NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andrii Yermak in 2022 and establishes the general framework for the necessary security guarantees for Ukraine.

[5] These G7 Guarantees constitute a multilateral framework guiding future bilateral security commitments and arrangements, which will ensure a sustainable Ukrainian defence force and capacity through security assistance, support for the Ukrainian defence industry, training and training exercises, intelligence sharing and support in the cyber realm (US Department of State, 2023).

production and transform the country into a weapons production hub for the West. To fully realize this goal, Kyiv needs investment and access to technologies which many partners countries are reluctant to share. If Ukraine continues to secure Western military investment and receives Western arms deliveries to liberate strategically vital areas currently occupied by Russian forces, it stands a good chance of sustaining its military forces with limited external assistance.

Extracting strategic insights: lessons from South Korea, Taiwan, and Finland with a view of Ukraine

Ukraine has outlined its preconditions for achieving a just conclusion to the war in President Zelensky's Victory Plan and Ukraine's Peace Formula, both based on the UN Charter. One of the key points addressed is the security guarantees that will ensure non-recurrence of Russia's invasion and further annexation of Ukraine's territory.[6] South Korea achieved this with the support of US troops stationed on its soil, which helped repel North Korean forces and led to a long-term military alliance with the United States. The Combined Forces Command, based in South Korea, presents a successful model for ensuring non-recurrence guarantees. The example of South Korea can only be applied to Ukraine in a limited way for at least two reasons: a) to this day, no peace treaty[7] has been reached between South and North Korea, whereas for Ukraine, the absence of a negotiated settlement could become an obstacle to its NATO and EU accession; b) it would be far more challenging to apply this model in Ukraine due to differences in scale — the Ukraine-Russia frontline exceeds 1,200 km, while the dividing line between South and North Korea is only 240 km.

The South Korean model also involves inherent dependence on an external ally, creating a risk of potentially lowering the necessity of the buildup of its own military and defense capability, and creating incentives for the persistent asymmetrical dependence of both sides on this alliance. South Korea has been able to reduce this dependence by enhancing its own military and defense capacities, and by gradually increasing its financial contribution to the cost of stationing US troops on its territory (Kim 2024). Ukraine also has significant potential to contribute to military alliances, not only by sharing its valuable battlefield experience and innovative technological knowhow, but also by enhancing its self-sufficiency through increased arms purchasing power and defense industrial capacity.

While Ukraine is currently focused on securing a similar military alliance with NATO and its partner states, the experiences of Taiwan and South Korea in sustaining military alliances could provide valuable insights for Ukraine to increase its chances of forming such an alliance. Both Taiwan and South Korea have prioritized the development of their high-tech industries, bolstering their economic strength and leveraging economic growth to support significant military partnerships. South Korea's capability to financially support the presence of the USFK and Taiwan's increased capacity for arms purchases illustrate how economic strength can underpin robust alliances. For Ukraine, advancing key sectors like construction, metallurgy (metals and electric machines), agriculture (cereals, oil seeds and fruits), manufacturing industry, energy, the IT sector and transportation (Economic Governance and EMU Scrutiny Unit 2024) during wartime and post-war periods will not only enhance self-sufficiency but also may attract new allies to support its foreign and security policy globally.

[6] The points of President Zelensky's Victory Plan and Ukraine's Peace Formula are laid out on the Official Internet Representation website of the President of Ukraine.

[7] The Korean Armistice Agreement between South and North Korea was signed on 27 July 1953. It established the military demarcation line between two countries and implemented a ceasefire between the sides. However, it is a military document, rather than a peace agreement between the governments.

In Taiwan's case, there are frequent reports of US military specialists training soldiers on the island itself, while Ukrainian troops are currently trained in Europe, often within the Ramstein or EUMAM[8] framework. In the context of Ukraine, the success in addressing the immediate threat would be multiplied if NATO members would consider increased engagement on Ukrainian soil, such as sending military maintenance personnel for military equipment repairs or relocating the training for the Ukrainian Armed Forces to Ukraine. This would enable better support to Ukraine during and after the war, by facilitating weapon systems training, extending training periods, and reducing the battlefield connectivity problem (Zandee & Baedts 2024).

In terms of its prospects of joining NATO, which Ukraine views as the only actor able to provide security guarantees, the Finnish example might be relevant. Finland focused on integrating its military with NATO standards long before applying for NATO membership, which allowed for a quick NATO accession process later on (Käihkö 2024). Additionally, Seoul's demand for US security guarantees, following pressure to accept a ceasefire, shows how these bilateral commitments can stimulate post-war deterrence. Given that various states are already engaging with Ukraine to provide security guarantees, this might apply to Ukraine even amid the ongoing war. However, considering the failure of the Budapest Memorandum and Ukraine's strong preference for full NATO membership, much will depend on the depth and credibility of these commitments. Potential guarantors of the security of Ukraine would have to establish concrete mechanisms that enable quick and decisive responses to enforce the ceasefire.

Taiwan's 'porcupine strategy,' aimed at complicating any potential invasion by bolstering its defensive capabilities, increasingly relies on acquiring arms for defense. This results in a dependency on weaponry manufactured in the United States, although Taiwan invests heavily in its own high-tech industry as a deterrence strategy and to increase the country's competitiveness. This aspect is also important for Ukraine, because even if Kyiv succeeds in scaling up its missile and artillery production despite the continuous strikes on energy infrastructure, it will still maintain its dependence on the delivery of Western weapon systems. Additionally, Taiwan's use of American-made weapons might be curtailed by the US in order to avoid drastically upsetting the cross-strait military balance (Lee 2024). For Ukraine's long-term deterrence it is essential to escape similar limitations on its domestic defense industry and acquisition of weapons, while simultaneously restricting excessive military expenditure to enable economic growth and recovery.

Sustaining military alliances comes at a price. For instance, South Korea's alliance with the US led to debates over relinquishing operational control of its military to a joint command. In 1994, the ROK–US Combined Forces Command transferred peacetime operational control (OPCON) of the ROK armed forces to South Korea while retaining wartime OPCON. Another example is South Korea's military engagements abroad as part of military alliances, which have sometimes lacked full domestic support.[9] Looking ahead to securing a military alliance, Ukraine can draw from examples in South Korea and Taiwan to potentially incorporate conditions that reduce restrictions on defense production and export (as seen in Taiwan) and military engagements abroad (as illustrated by South Korea's involvement in Vietnam). By doing so, Ukraine can better leverage its export potential while prioritizing its security and the interests of its alliances.

[8] The European Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) focuses specifically on providing support through training the Ukrainian armed forces. This training is currently organised on EU territory (Zandee & Baedts, 2024).

[9] South Korea's military engagements abroad as part of military alliances include its contributions to the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf War and the Vietnam Wars. For more examples, please refer to Insoo, K., (2024) Post-War Security Sector Reform in South Korea. Geneva: DCAF.

CHAPTER 3

Internal balancing strategies (1): enhancing the effectiveness of the defense sector

The development of a domestic military industrial complex and army capabilities in Ukraine

After gaining independence, Ukraine inherited substantial manpower and equipment from the Soviet armed forces, along with their doctrine and structure. However, over time, there were significant reductions in personnel and inventory. Prior to 2014, Ukraine had initiated military reforms focused on mobile operations with a smaller, professional force using modern equipment. Nevertheless, funding limitations slowed the pace of change, and most weapons remained of Soviet-era origin despite the suspension of conscription in 2013 due to budgeting constraints.

The events of 2014 triggered a 22% surge in military expenditure that year, followed by an additional 11% increase in 2015 (Wezeman & Kuimova 2018). This resulted in a notable rise in military spending relative to both GDP and government expenditure, indicating a heightened prioritization of military allocations over other areas of government spending during that period. Ukraine inherited a significant arms industry from the Soviet Union, but much of it deteriorated as its main client, the Soviet Union, collapsed. Before 2022, Ukraine relied heavily on its own industry for new weapons and maintenance. However, gaps existed in its arms industry, such as the lack of rifle and machine gun plants.[10]

The outbreak of violence in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 revealed grave deficiencies in equipment like night-vision systems, electronic warfare systems, communications, and specialized radars, though domestic production has sustained Ukrainian forces (Wezeman & Kuimova 2018). When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the Ukrainian Armed Forces were in a wholly different condition than 8 years before. Since the large-scale invasion, Ukraine has been able to continue its military production despite wide-scale attacks on infrastructure by using innovative methods, such as refurbishing or remodeling older weapon systems with more modern firepower (Jakes 2024). Examples of Ukrainian innovation include the creative use of Ukrainian-made maritime drones called Sea Babies which caused significant damage to Russia's Black Sea fleet, and the offensive rather than defensive use of US Patriot systems (Jakes 2024; Barnes & Santora 2024). Despite these innovations, Ukrainian production remains relatively small scale and Ukraine remains highly dependent on foreign supplies. The recent indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv highlight that Ukraine currently lacks sufficient air defense systems to properly protect critical infrastructure and cities (Voitovych 2024).

Identifying challenges in the effectiveness of the defense sector in Ukraine during the war

Ukraine faces a significant challenge in maintaining its innovative advantage, as Russia has quickly learned and adapted its strategies accordingly (Ryan 2024). In the first part of 2024 Russia has gained the initiative on the battlefield, not least due to delays in the delivery of air defense systems and other military equipment. Persistent attacks on energy infrastructure inevitably affect military industrial production (Méheut 2024). Although Ukraine has the upper hand in terms of quality due to its better-trained troops and superior equipment, this qualitative edge has decreased as the war has dragged on. Russia's numerical advantage and its large-scale and unscathed defense industry stands in stark contrast with the continuous airstrikes the Ukrainian military industry has to endure.

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, various European countries and defense industry businesses have made agreements to invest in Ukraine's defense sector. Enterprises such as the German arms giant Rheinmetall and the Turkish drone producer Baykar are

[10] For more information, please refer to Sanders, D., (2023) Ukraine's third wave of military reform 2016-2022 – building a military able to defend Ukraine against the Russian invasion. Taylor & Francis.

constructing or plan to construct factories, likely in the western part of the country (Jakes 2024). In late 2023, Kyiv established a Defense Industries Alliance, attracting companies from 19 different countries. In September 2023, the first International Defense Industries Forum in Kyiv brought together over 250 defense firms from 30 countries to collaborate on joint production ventures. Through these agreements, Ukraine aims to develop its defense industrial base domestically and in Eastern and Central Europe (Stepanenko et al. 2024).

Currently, there is a substantial need for military aid from partners for Kyiv to be able to withstand persistent Russian attacks on its territory. Transitioning from this inconsistent flow of defense support to a more sustainable stream of aid for both the military and the defense industrial complex in Ukraine is high on the political agenda of many of Ukraine's allies.

Extracting strategic insights: lessons from South Korea, Taiwan, and Finland with a view of Ukraine

Given the current circumstances, Ukraine has no choice but to increase its defense budget, now reaching about 50% of the country's annual state budget, to bolster its defense industry (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023). In the long-term, this share must decrease as it hampers economic growth. While there are many differences, notably the military alliances and the presence of US troops on the territories of both South Korea and Taiwan, the experiences of these countries in developing their own defense capabilities while limiting military expenses as a percentage of GDP might be useful for Ukraine.

South Korea achieved this through defense reforms that focused on cost-effective defense management, troop reduction, and transforming into a technology-intensive military without causing economic hardship. This shift to a quality-oriented military structure, with significant expenditure on defense technology research and development, shows a path to strong defense capabilities without compromising economic and democratic development (Kim 2024). However, this was done gradually and only after the end of hostilities with North Korea, enforced by US security guarantees, and with US troops and weapons present within South Korea's territory.

Taiwan also invests heavily in high-tech innovations and indigenous technology development to reduce dependence on other countries, even though these investments may not be immediately profitable. This strategy increases deterrence, akin to Finland and Ukraine's emphasis on indigenous production despite extensive trade with other countries.

Ukraine has already begun addressing this issue by attracting foreign investment for economic recovery and partnering with countries like Germany, the United Kingdom, and Turkey to build defense industry factories. While this may not immediately foster economic growth, Ukraine's status as a heavily industrialized nation with a highly educated and technologically adept population, coupled with its history of significant arms production during Soviet times and as a notable arms exporter during its independence, works to its advantage. Despite the Russian occupation and destruction of key industrial areas, there is potential for recovery to establish a robust defense industrial base to support its military forces.

South Korea and Taiwan have both established volunteer forces alongside their mandatory conscription armies. In these countries, the duration of conscription has been a contentious issue, with democratic parties leveraging this issue for electoral gain (Kim 2024; Lee 2024). The Ukrainian government is currently facing significant challenges in its mobilization efforts, particularly in the context of a prolonged, high-intensity war. It is now transitioning towards contract-based military service model and introducing basic military training in colleges starting from 2025 alongside intensive military training for conscripted soldiers. The Ukrainian government is also reforming conscription practices to maintain combat readiness by implementing

a more targeted approach, ensuring that conscripts are deployed in roles that align with their skills. However, maintaining large conscription and all-volunteer forces is costly both during war and in peacetime.

At present, such significant investment it is not economically viable for Ukraine, which is why the focus is on innovative technologies like Unmanned Systems Forces, aimed to 'replace a person in the trench, at sea, in the air and underwater' (Kushnir 2024). Considering financial and demographic constraints, policies are being developed to further extend service time. Ukraine is exploring ways to retain experienced soldiers in the army for longer periods and to facilitate the remobilization of veterans.[11]

Another example relates to the composition and development of the armed forces in Finland. Given that Finland needs to defend a large territory and a long border with Russia, it has focused on land forces as more cost-effective than air and naval forces. In Ukraine, the land component is also more developed than the air or naval components. Maintaining a large reserve after the war will likely be integral to Ukraine's post-2022 security, along with a strong air force to protect its cities and ensure air dominance near the front lines. This large reserve of land forces will be particularly important for Ukraine's eventual NATO membership, addressing a known weak point in European NATO forces. For Black Sea security, maintaining a naval component is crucial and could become increasingly important once Ukraine regains control over its ports in the Black Sea.

[11] During the special period, military personnel may, at their request, extend their term of military service under a new contract for a period of 1 to 10 years, but not beyond reaching the maximum age for military service. Article 23 of the Law of Ukraine on Military Duty and Military Service (Information of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1992, № 27, Art. 385).

CHAPTER 4

Internal balancing strategies (2): accountability and democratic control of the armed forces

The development of the system and mechanisms of the democratic control of the armed forces in Ukraine

After Ukraine regained its independence, the traditional close ties between the political and security pillars were maintained, while control over security was predominantly left to the executive, specifically the president as commander-in-chief and Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, while the parliament and its Committee on National Security and Defense held limited power (Fluri & Shalamanov 2003). The Euromaidan Revolution in 2014 and subsequent hostilities in Donbas highlighted the government's failures in security, prompting civil society to fill crucial gaps as a de facto security actor (Puglisi 2015). These developments partially broke the long-standing pattern of distrust between the security sector and citizens (Soldatiuk-Westerveld et al. 2023).

The 2018 Law on National Security of Ukraine established a robust oversight system to enhance civilian control over military and security forces. It introduced reforms to align Ukraine's security practices with NATO standards and improve accountability within the armed forces. The law underscored the role of the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) as the central body for coordinating national security policy, responsible for formulating strategies and ensuring their alignment with democratic values and human rights. It mandates regular public reporting on security assessments, allowing for greater scrutiny of government actions.

Additional oversight mechanisms for transparent procurement, in accordance with the transparency requirements of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, were enacted with the 2020 Law on Defence Procurement, developed in consultation with civil society organisations. However, its implementation has been temporarily delayed due to restrictions on public access to defence procurement information for security-related reasons following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 (Soldatiuk-Westerveld et al. 2023).

Identifying challenges in establishing an effective democratic control of the armed forces in Ukraine during the war

The foundation for parliamentary oversight is institutionally established, yet it still partly lacks access to security sector processes concerning information exchange, procurement, and strategy drafting. Moreover, parliament lacks sufficient capacity and operational procedures to fulfil its oversight function adequately, with wartime media freedom restrictions exacerbating oversight challenges. Under the current situation of martial law, power is centralized in the presidential office and the National Security and Defense Council, leading to the marginalization of parliamentary influence. This underscores the necessity of reassessing existing institutional mechanisms and finalizing the reform of the public administration sector for parliament and civil society to participate effectively and consistently in security sector governance.

Currently, civil society engagements are generally ad hoc, with parliament often sidelined in these interactions. Initiatives such as the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (NAKO) and the Temporary Special Commission on Monitoring the Receipt and Use of International Material and Technical Assistance During Martial Law have considerably enhanced the transparency of the defense sector's functioning and increased civilian control, but their effectiveness hinges on the degree of priority accorded by international stakeholders (Soldatiuk-Westerveld et al. 2023). In brief, strengthening both parliament's capacity and civil society monitoring will be crucial to ensuring effective civil-military oversight.

Extracting strategic insights: lessons from South Korea, Taiwan, and Finland with a view of Ukraine

While Finland is often hailed as a successful model of integrating democracy and defense, its history underscores the fragility of democratic civil-military relations when confronted with internal and external threats. Furthermore, the historical trend observed in Finland, akin to Ukraine, where both civilian and military leadership have tended to circumvent parliamentary oversight, underscores the crucial need for robust parliamentary engagement in military matters to uphold accountability and transparency. The establishment of a parliamentary defense committee and an Intelligence Oversight Committee in Finland, which broadened political and societal participation in defense planning, offers a valuable model. This committee oversees both civilian and military intelligence authorities as an autonomous and independent body with investigative powers and broad access to information. Similarly, Ukraine's existing parliamentary committee could strengthen its oversight role in the post-war period by increasing resources and operational capabilities. Restoring access to activities and information that were restricted during martial law is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability. Additionally, rebuilding civic engagement mechanisms, reestablishing governance procedures, and providing open channels for public participation in the legislative process will be crucial for reinforcing parliamentary oversight. This model of specific external oversight, where a designated group has exclusive access to sensitive information, seems well-suited for Ukraine. It ensures that not all sensitive information must be made public, thereby balancing transparency with security.

Additionally, Finland's transition towards objective civilian control over the armed forces, which grants the military autonomy within its professional domain, could inspire military reforms during and after the war. However, Finland's model of objective civil control faces challenges due to societal trust issues and a lack of critical journalism (Käihkö 2024). If Ukraine were to adopt a similar approach, it would be crucial to bolster it with robust protection for independent media and other measures that safeguard and enhance Ukraine's already vibrant civil society. While the state of war naturally centralizes powers and encourages secrecy in decision-making processes, various actors in Ukraine are actively working to counteract these tendencies. A case in point is the anti-corruption disclosure law, which mandates hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian officials to publicly declare their assets. Although full public disclosure is temporarily suspended due to the ongoing war, civil society organizations still have access to this information (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation 2023).

For Ukraine, it is also relevant to note that Taiwan's fair, transparent, and regular elections have moderated competition in a polarized society and reconfirmed political mandates. Newly elected civilian leaders can redefine civil-military relations according to their vision and agenda. Moreover, Taiwan's adherence to civilian supremacy within the military, despite tensions between the civilian and military elites, facilitated by regular regime turnovers and institutional promotion rules, offers valuable insights for Ukraine. In this regard, since Ukraine is operating under the martial law during wartime, organizing representative elections is currently impossible. However, it is crucial for Ukraine to hold these elections as soon as the war context will allow for it.

South Korea's experience illustrates the complexities of growing military influence during wartime, which, if not properly managed, could impede post-war reconstruction and democratic development. The South Korean approach to subjective civilian control, marked by presidential oversight and legislative checks on military power, offers a model for potential civilian oversight mechanisms in Ukraine. The president exerts vertical control over the military, preventing any one group of officers from gaining excessive power, while horizontal control allows the National Assembly to oversee presidential authority. In contrast, Finland's response to the persistent Soviet threat led to the establishment of a 'strong presidency' under Kekkonen's leadership, characterized by authoritarian tendencies and undemocratic practices, such as media censorship and suppression of opposition parties (Käihkö 2024). For Ukraine, various strategies can be adopted or further developed, including further decentralization efforts, transparency policies and measures to counter disinformation. In South Korea it took approximately 40 years of relative stability and economic growth for the presidential office to hand back sufficient control back to the parliament. Similarly to Ukraine, in South Korea media and civil society organizations play a crucial role in monitoring military actions and decisions, providing an additional layer of civilian oversight.

Conclusion

Due to its geopolitical position and the absence of a strong military alliance, Ukraine is compelled to diversify its external military partnerships through bilateral security agreements. This approach is prudent, given the reluctance of some NATO's members to grant Ukraine an invitation to join the Alliance. As discussions about Europe's security architecture and greater Europe's presence in NATO unfold, Ukraine must actively participate and play an active role in the evolution of Europe's security landscape. It is crucial for Ukraine to be perceived as part of Europe's security environment and to avoid being labelled as a buffer zone, which would impede economic development and leave it vulnerable to external threats. Integration into NATO and Europe's security architecture is essential for Ukraine's survival.

Before the invasion Ukraine had a robust, albeit somewhat outdated military industry infrastructure, encompassing research, development and production for the air, land, and naval forces. With parts of its territory that are crucial for the military industry now occupied and extensive damage to critical infrastructure across Ukraine, the country faces the immense challenge of balancing infrastructure rebuilding, economic and human capital recovery, and heavy defense industry restoration and modernization. The scale of the challenge Ukraine faces is immense, but if certain conditions are met, Ukraine has the potential to transform its economy, defense, and society into a prosperous and modern European nation.

First, Ukraine needs a period of peace, which in the short-term can only be guaranteed by the NATO alliance, to recover its economy and rebuild critical infrastructure. Second, robust, transparent, and accountable government institutions are essential for Ukraine's growth and recovery, necessitating further progress in comprehensive reforms in public administration and parliamentary systems, along with increased human and financial resources. Third, maintaining Ukraine's already robust civil-military oversight and strengthening parliamentary control over the armed forces is crucial.

When analyzing the experiences of South Korea, Taiwan and Finland, many differences arise compared to Ukraine, making direct comparison challenging. Notably, South Korea and Taiwan secured military alliances with the US and were regarded as strategically important by the US. In all three cases, the various adversaries recognized the separate national identities of South Korea, Taiwan, and Finland, whereas Russia denies the separate identity of Ukraine, affecting the conflict framework and potential negotiations. However, the cases of South Korea, Taiwan and Finland offer valuable insights into how internal balancing between civilian and military leadership might unravel in the decades to come, allowing Ukraine to lay the groundwork for effective civil-military relations. In Ukraine, democratic control over the armed forces is maintained not just by parliament but also by civilian political leadership and civil society, mitigating the risk of the 'militarization of politics' during martial law. South Korea's post-war era, characterized by democratic disruptions due to military influence, serves as a warning for Ukraine to uphold democratic control.

Finland's example of robust parliamentary engagement in defense planning, South Korea's concept of subjective civilian control and the vertical and horizontal control over military and civilian leadership, along with Taiwan's adherence to civilian supremacy within the military, facilitated by regular regime turnovers and institutional promotion rules, provide practical models for Ukraine. These examples illustrate how to maintain and evolve civil-military oversight.

South Korea offers good examples of building a domestic defense industry while maintaining low defense spending as a percentage of GDP. Taiwan has demonstrated the value of investing in military research and innovations, despite high costs, to increase deterrence. Finland's large, combat-ready, lean forces reserves add another layer of security.

Learning from the example of South Korea, there is a strong argument for 'boots on the ground' to provide security guarantees and to enforce non-recurrence of Russian attacks. Finland's integration of its military with NATO standards before applying for NATO membership underscores the importance of the continued strengthening and modernizing of Ukraine's armed forces and security sector, regardless of the timeline for NATO accession. Taiwan's experience highlights the challenge of external limitations on its defense industry, while maintaining its dependency on Western weapon systems. For Ukraine's long-term deterrence, it is essential to escape similar limitations on its domestic defense industry and weapons acquisition while balancing military expenditure to support economic growth and recovery.

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DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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